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SPORTS

Winchester wrestlers finish second as a team in state sectionals with eight moving on to divisional round

JOE MCCONNELL | SPORTS EDITOR

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Winchester High wrestler Ilyas Malik, at 175-pounds, shows off his guillotine move during the annual Division 1 Central / Metro state sectional tournament at Malden High School on Feb. 14. Malik went on to win his second sectional tournament championship after sitting out last year with an injury. COURTESY PHOTO/LIAM RITTENHOUSE

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For the most part, the Winchester High wrestling team has been going at it since the Monday after Thanksgiving with a bunch of practices, dual meets and independent tournaments on its schedule. They were rewarded for their hard work Feb. 14 during the annual Division 1 Central / Metro state sectional tournament at Malden High School.

“It’s been a long season, and after this sectional tournament it’s (unfortunately) over for most on the team,” said Assistant Coach Vitaly Napadow. “For many of the seniors, it’s also the end of their high school wrestling careers. It’s been a distinct pleasure watching them grow up and develop into varsity wrestlers throughout the last four years, and I know the lessons they learned on the mat will be something they will take with them for the rest of their lives.”

Napadow also brought up the underclassmen, and he would tell them that there’s an off-season ahead. He’d mentioned to them again what Head Coach Ryan Errico strongly recommends that they should get into a club program or two, even if it’s only for a single weekend day in the spring. Summer and fall camps would also be beneficial for them to get ready for next winter, even if they participate in other sports.

But with the exception of those wrestlers who didn’t make the final cut at the sectionals last Saturday, the Red & Black still had a great showing among their statewide counterparts, where they fought hard to place second only to Arlington as a team. A total of 14 schools qualified for this first postseason meet.

“We had a very competitive group of seniors this year, and most who competed in the sectionals contributed points to the overall team total,” said Napadow.

Eight Winchester wrestlers placed in the sectionals, with seven c
finishing in the top four of their respective weight classes to autom

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qualify for the Division 1 state meet, and among that group there were three champions.

“That’s a huge accomplishment for the program,” said Napadow.

Winchester High sophomore wrestler Leo Gannon, at 132-pounds, employs a half-nelson on his Needham opponent during the annual Division 1 Central / Metro state sectional tournament at Malden High School on Feb. 14. COURTESY PHOTO/LIAM RITTENHOUSE

Kai Napadow Baquero pinned his way through the whole tournament at 120-pounds, before beating a ranked wrestler in the finals to defend his crown.

At 138-pounds, Eddie Donlon also had a dominant run to the finals, and once there, he had a memorable performance against a highly-ranked Wellesley wrestler. Donlon ended up securing the victory by the narrowest of margins, 1-0.

All four of these wrestlers know each other quite well, because t
practice together at the MetroWest United Wrestling Club in the o

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There's a feeling that they might see each other again in the state divisional meet or even the All-States.

At 175-pounds, Ilyas Malik fought off a Brookline sophomore in a very competitive final with a last second double takedown to come away with his second sectional title after missing last year with an injury. It was also his 100th career varsity triumph.

"All three of our competing captains stood atop the podium," Napadow said proudly.

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At 215-pounds, Shaun Garrett upset a ranked wrestler from Wellesley in the semifinals to take second place.

"That was a big win for Shaun, who has improved a lot this season, and now looks ready for the Division 1 state field," said Napadow.

Winchester's third place finishers were sophomore Leo Gannon at 132-pounds and Luca Kovacev at 165.

"It's always tough to wrestle back through the consolation bracket after taking your first loss in the tournament, but third placers can (always) say that they still finished the sectional tournament with a win," said Napadow.

The top four advance to the state divisional round, and as a result first year wrestler Rani Audi punched his ticket with a fourth-place finish at 106-pounds.

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Winchester High wrestler Shaun Garrett, at 215-pounds, puts a headlock on his Wellesley opponent during the annual Division 1 Central / Metro state sectional tournament at Malden High School on Feb. 14. COURTESY PHOTO/LIAM RITTENHOUSE

Henry Wallace, coming back from injury and illness, was credited with a fifth-place finish, and will serve as an alternate in the 126-pound weight class.

“Henry, a two-time sectional champion, has had a great (high school) career,” said Napadow. “He finished this season at 15-8, and is 72-34 over the last four years.”

Seniors Thomas Blake (144-pounds) and Casey Trumbower (150) were pinned in their matches, while classmates Beni Curcio (157) and Davis Jensen (285) also came up short, and as a result their high school wrestling careers are now over.

“These boys have contributed a lot to the program the last four years, many times wrestling up a weight class or two, and we appreciate their work,” said Napadow.

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It's now on to the state divisional round this weekend for the seven Winchester qualifiers and one alternate, starting Feb. 20 at North Andover High School.

Joe McConnell is a longtime, award-winning sports editor for numerous North Shore publications. He began covering Winchester sports for the News in November 2024 and is currently its Sports Editor. He can be reached at editor@winchesternews.org.

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Winchester boys basketball heads to Bridgewater-Raynham for Sweet 16 game after beating Lexington in postseason opener

SPORTS

Winchester wrestling enjoys Top 10 finish at state divisional meet; senior captains move [illegible] States

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It was the third meeting this year between Middlesex League boys basketball rivals Lexington (16-5, 11th seed) and Winchester (17-4, 22nd seed). They split the first two during the regular season, thus making this Round of 32 postseason matchup the impromptu rubber game of this year's series, with the

JOE MCCONNELL | SPORTS EDITOR

March 3, 2026

After the Winchester High qualified wrestlers competed hard over two days last weekend (Feb. 20, 21) in the State Division 1 Meet at North Andover High School, Mother Nature gave them a break to rest and recuperate with Monday's blizzard that resulted in two days off from school. There

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February 28, 2026

SPORTS

Winchester boys hockey advances to the Sweet 16 after beating Wachusett in the tournament opener

The Winchester High boys hockey team (12-9-2), the 17th seed, edged the 16th-seeded Wachusett Regional Mountaineers (18-2-1), 5-4 in a Round of 32 Division 1 state tournament game at Westborough's Northstar Ice Arena on Feb. 25. The Red & Black will now take on top seed Catholic Memorial (18-2-1)

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February 27, 2026

SPORTS

With postseason starting Friday night, WHS boys hoop seniors English, Sarpong, Burbine join Middlesex League elite

The Winchester High boys basketball team, the 22nd seed, will take on Middlesex League rival Lexington, the 11th seed, to begin the Division 1 state tournament in the Round of 32 on Friday night, Feb. 27, starting at 6 p.m. These teams are so evenly matched, beginning with the

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EVENTS

Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

March 4, 2026

NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

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By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester

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The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On

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High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS
March 4, 2026

Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

March 4, 2026

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